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Winchester Select Board signals support for 7% water and sewer rate increase

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

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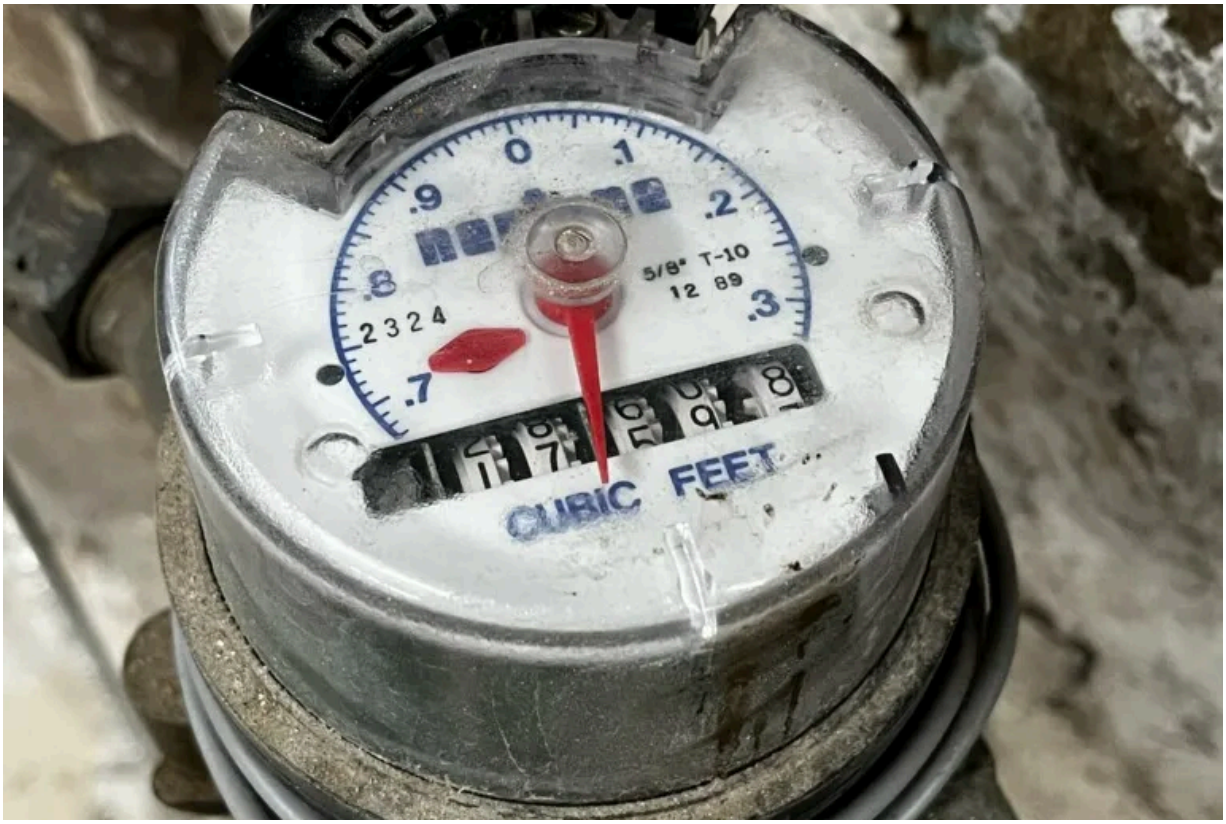

The Select Board is examining a 7% rate increase in water and sewer rates. A public hearing will be held March 30 when the board will take a formal vote on the measure. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/PETER CASEY

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The Winchester Select Board signaled support March 16 for a 7% [illegible] in water and sewer rates for fiscal year 2027, with a formal vote expected at

a public hearing scheduled for March 30.

Consultant Mark Abrahams of the Abrahams Group presented three rate options to the board during a presentation that covered the Water and Sewer Enterprise Fund's financial outlook through fiscal year 2031. All three options were designed to bring the fund's retained earnings balance into the town's longstanding target range of 8% to 10% of total expenditures within five years.

The board's preferred option would apply a flat 7% annual increase across all five years of the rate plan. For the average residential user, that translates to an increase of roughly $16 per quarterly bill in fiscal year 2027, rising from $267.61 to $283.89, according to the rate study.

No formal vote was taken, as the board must first hold a public hearing.

Abrahams told the board that without any rate action, the fund faces a projected deficit of approximately $863,000 in fiscal year 2027, growing to nearly $2.9 million by fiscal year 2031. He said the current retained earnings balance could absorb a single year's deficit but nothing beyond that.

"Even in FY27, we think it's going somewhere in the $800,000 range," Abrahams said of the no-action scenario.

The presentation noted the fund had a strong revenue year in fiscal year 2026, with user charges projected at $8.57 million, driven largely by dry summer conditions that increased water consumption. That figure was well above the $7.57 million collected in fiscal year 2025 and the $6.12 million in fiscal year 2024, which Abrahams described as a wet year.

Even so, he cautioned that after subtracting the $760,000 in retai
earnings appropriated to balance the current budget, the fund's su

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without that funding source was only $235,000.

“[The] $235,000 in your strongest revenue year means that revenues generally are not really keeping up with expenses,” Abrahams said.

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On the assessment side, the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority’s preliminary fiscal year 2027 water assessment rose 8.8% compared to fiscal year 2026 — a figure Abrahams attributed to increased water usage in 2025.

The 8.8% represents the combined increase in the authority’s operations-and-maintenance and capital charges to Winchester for water service. The sewer assessment, by contrast, increased just 1%, which Abrahams said reflected stabilization after a three-year spike caused by the installation of new sewer meters.

Select Board member Bill McGonigle said he favored a level approach.

“I always prefer the plans that just kind of keep things level,” he said.

Member Paras Bhayani asked whether the board could take a one-year rate holiday, given that retained earnings could cover the fiscal year 2027 deficit.

Abrahams ran the numbers during the meeting and said skipping a year would require increases of roughly 10.5% annually in subsequent years to reach the retained earnings target.

Several board members noted the timing alongside a Proposition 2½ override ballot question scheduled for March 21.

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"If that passes, people are going to see their tax rates go up," member Anthea Brady said. "And then, if we come to Town Meeting and say, and also, you know, it's another $65 to $100 on your water bill a year, it does add up."

Brady also raised the possibility of adding a fourth pricing tier to the rate structure as a way to generate additional revenue from high-volume users while encouraging conservation.

Robert LaBossiere, director of public works, said such a change would require a study and could not be implemented for the coming fiscal year.

The board is expected to take a formal vote on the rate increase at its March 30 meeting, with the approved rate then going before the April 27 Town Meeting for final action.

Will Dowd is a Massachusetts journalist who covers municipal government and community life for Winchester News. He runs The Marblehead Independent, a reader-funded digital newsroom.

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Winchester ZBA waives town regulations to move Washington/Swanton project along

Town officials have approved waivers of regulations for a residential/commercial development project at Washington and Swanton streets. The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) on March 19 approved the waivers for a 40B project at 278-292 Washington St. and 12 and 16-20 Swanton St. in a special meeting preceding a

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Winchester News reviewed precinct-level election results from every annual town election since 2014 — 13 years of data covering turnout, ballot questions, Select Board races, School Committee contests and Planning Board results — and compared them against the March 21 preliminary numbers. The 2026 results have not yet been certified by Town

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March 25, 2026

After Winchester voters rejected an $11.5 million Proposition 2 1/2 override on Election Day, March 21, the governing question in town has shifted from persuasion to arithmetic. Select Board member Bill McGonigle, who served on the Yes for Winchester campaign, said the defeat has changed how he approaches

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Network for Social Justice to celebrate 35th anniversary

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: The Network For Social Justice turns 35 this spring! There will be a celebration on Saturday, April 11, from 7-9:30 p.m., at the Sons of Italy, 117 Swanton St., Winchester. Connect with your local friends and neighbors as

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Winchester Community Music School presents Jazz Jam Session

The following was submitted by the Winchester Community Music School: On Saturday, March 28, join the community at Winchester Community Music School, 407 Highland Ave., for a Jazz Jam Session, an afternoon of fun, spontaneous jazz playing, beginning at 3 p.m. Instrumentalists and vocalists of all skill levels are

March 25, 2026

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